



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Doctrinal Catechesis Session  
Mary Birmingham

## JESUS CHRIST



Icon of Jesus Christ in the church in village Izvor, Serbia



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I  
touch.

### ✓ Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session.  
Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best  
suited for your particular group.



## Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's  
liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the **Breaking  
Open the Word** worksheet for this week.

### Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in  
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT  
Rev. Steven Olds  
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR  
† Most Rev. John Noonan  
Bishop of Orlando

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Macalintal, & Nick Wagner

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# Sharing Human Experience

Catechist introduces this session in these or similar words:

- ▶ Christians have a lot of knowledge about Jesus and about what we believe about Jesus. It is important to get all our information about Jesus out in front so we can more fully enter into relationship with him.

Catechist invites participants to engage in the following exercise in small groups of four. Appoint a scribe to write the group's answers.

- ▶ Part I: Divide paper in half. List everything you know about Jesus Christ on the left side of the paper.
  - After about three or four minutes, the scribes stand and present the answers from each table.
- ▶ Part II: Considering what you know about Jesus, what could prompt martyrs to give their lives in support of his life and mission? First, discuss your answers, and then on the right side of the paper, write a summary of your answers. After six or seven minutes, invite the scribe from each table to present each table's responses.

Catechist leads a discussion now in the wider group, using this question:

- ▶ What did you learn about Jesus Christ from this exercise?

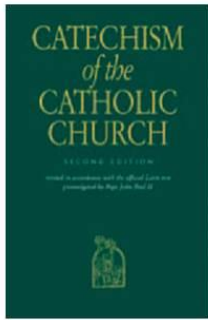
Catechist invites participants to reflect with one other person the following question:

- ▶ What do you believe about Jesus?
- ▶ What does Jesus Christ mean to you today?
- ▶ Who is Jesus for you?

Wider group: Catechist invites participants to briefly summarize their responses in the wider group. Catechist draws out insights from their reflections.



The Books, by Mark Hakomaki. 2006.



# Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 422-682

- ▶ Jesus said to Peter, “Who do the people say I am? Who do you say that I am?”
- ▶ Disciples, theologians and evangelists have been answering Jesus’ question to Peter for 2,000 years.
- ▶ What do we officially believe about Jesus Christ?
- ▶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that we confess faith in Jesus of Nazareth.
  - He was born a Jew.
  - He was born of a Jewish woman at Bethlehem at the time of King Herod and emperor Caesar Augustus.
  - Jesus was a carpenter by trade.
  - He was tortured and crucified in Jerusalem at the hands of Pontius Pilate during the reign of Emperor Tiberius.
  - He is the eternal Son of God made man. In other words, as God’s Son there never was a time when he did not exist.
  - John the evangelist tells us that he came from God (13:3) and that he descended from heaven (3:13; 6:33).
  - John further reiterates that Jesus is “the Word made flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14, 16).
- ▶ What we believe about Jesus is found in sacred Scripture and Tradition, and it is summarized in the Nicene Creed.
- ▶ In the Nicene Creed, what we pray about Jesus, teaches us what we believe about him. The following is what we profess about Jesus Christ in every Sunday liturgy.

## The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,



consubstantial with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
and by the Holy Spirit  
was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.  
For our sake  
he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven and is seated  
at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life, who proceeds  
from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
I believe in one, holy, catholic,  
and apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the  
resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Catechist takes a flip chart and writes on the top of the chart, "Official Teaching about Jesus Christ."  
Invite participants to list everything the Nicene Creed teaches us about Christ. Glean responses from an  
open discussion. Appoint one scribe to write responses on the chart.

Catechist continues:

- ▶ The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and instructed her to name the baby she would carry "Jesus," which means "God saves."
- ▶ Jesus' mission would be to save people from their sins.
- ▶ By intentionally naming Jesus, the angel Gabriel was signifying that God's own name is present in his Son who was sent to redeem the world of sin.
- ▶ Thus, we can call on the powerful name of Jesus Christ because he alone has the power to save us.
- ▶ There is power in Jesus' name. Every liturgical prayer ends with, "We ask this through Christ our Lord."
- ▶ The word "Christ" means "Messiah" which means "anointed." Christ was not his last name or family name. The word "Christ" simply signifies the mission for

which he was sent.

- ▶ The word Lord is also used in reference to Jesus. God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush. God revealed himself to Moses by the name YHWH, which was spoken as *Kyrios* or “Lord.” “Lord” was the name used for the God of Israel. The New Testament appropriated the term “Lord” as a reference to both God the Father and the second person of the Trinity, God’s Son, Jesus the Christ. In so doing Jesus was also recognized as God (CCC, 446).
- ▶ Many good observant Jews recognized Jesus to be the Messiah who it was prophesied would come from the House of David.
- ▶ Jesus’ anointing as Messiah was revealed to us at his baptism when the voice of God from heaven called Jesus his beloved Son.
- ▶ After Jesus’ resurrection, his divine Sonship became manifest to his disciples through his glorified humanity. It was not until Jesus broke bread with the disciples that they recognized him. There was something different about him. He appeared to them in his glorified state.
- ▶ Jesus’ had two distinct roles; God’s Son and his role as the Suffering Servant who would give his life for the many.

## Why Did Jesus Become a Human Being?

- ▶ *Jesus became a human being in order to reconcile us with God.*
  - We were lost in sin and needed to be healed.
  - We were living in darkness and had to be led into the light.
  - We were captives who needed a Savior.
  - We were prisoners to sin who needed God’s help.
  - We were slaves to sin who needed a deliverer.<sup>1</sup>
  - With humanity in such a dismal state, God, out of pure love, could do no less than send his Son to save us from sin and from ourselves.
- ▶ *Jesus became a human being so we might know God’s love for us.*
  - A theologian once said that if God had not sent his Son or a part of himself, it would be very easy for us to say to God, “Sure you love us. Right. You have no idea what we have suffered. You have not walked in our shoes. How can we believe you love us when life here can be so miserable? Unless you walk in our shoes we will never believe in your love for us.”
  - God had to send his Son, or we never would have believed his love for humanity.
- ▶ *Jesus became a human being in order to be for us an icon of holiness.*
  - Jesus was an example of holiness for us.
  - He taught us how to become holy.
- ▶ *Jesus became a human being so that we might share in his divine nature.*
  - We became God’s child through the Incarnation of God’s Son.
  - We pray in the Preface for Christmas and Epiphany that through the

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<sup>1</sup> (Cf. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Orat. Catech.* 15: PG 45, 48 B)

- Incarnation a divine exchange took place.
  - Christ sanctified all creation, especially humanity. In so doing human beings share Christ's divine nature.
  - As God's children, we share in the divinity of Christ.
- ▶ Jesus is fully human and fully divine.
- ▶ Jesus is the second person of the Blessed Trinity (three persons in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit).
- ▶ Jesus was born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Jesus established a kingdom of peace and harmony. He preached kingdom living. His mission was to teach us a new way of living and being in the world. He showed us the face of his Father. He taught us how to love. He taught us the self-sacrificing nature of love.
- ▶ Jesus suffered, died and rose from the dead in order to save humanity from sin and to open the gates of eternal life.

## The Heart of Our Faith

- ▶ Thus is the heart of our belief in Jesus Christ. We can articulate articles of belief, but unless and until we foster an intimate personal relationship with him, what we know about Jesus is simply information, biography, and history.
- ▶ We profess faith in the living Christ, a Christ who conquered death once and for all, who opened the gates of heaven so that we might all enjoy eternal life, and who is present to us and desires intimate communion with us through his Holy Spirit even though he is absent and sits at his Father's right hand in heaven.
- ▶ How do we move from an intellectual understanding of who Jesus is to professing him as Lord and Master of the Universe and of our lives?
- ▶ The first step is to consider the Jesus event from a historical perspective. The second step is to pray for the gift of faith and then yield to it. While we will never be able to fully prove everything we believe about Jesus, there is enough scholarly, researched, and proven information that can give our faith a sound footing and ultimately give credence to our belief in Christ.

## How Are We to Believe that Jesus Is Who We Say He Is and He Accomplished What He Set Out to Do?

- ▶ Crucial to our faith in Jesus is our belief in his resurrection from the dead.
- ▶ Without the resurrection, Jesus would simply be another great prophet among many great prophets.
- ▶ How can we be confident that Jesus rose from the dead beyond our assent in faith that he did?

## The case for Jesus' resurrection

- ▶ Consider for a moment Jesus' absolute certainty that he would rise from the dead. He told his disciples that he would rise again. If it turned out that he did not rise from the dead, he would simply be another imposter or con artist among many others. Certainly, a religion that has lasted over 2,000 years would not have had

the staying power if indeed the resurrection were a lie or a hoax.

- ▶ Let us recall the events of Calvary.
  - Jesus was brutally beaten, huge iron stakes were driven into his wrists, and he hung on the cross for hours. He died at 3:00 in the afternoon.
  - Jesus died at the same time the paschal lambs were being slaughtered for the sacrificial offering of atonement for sin.
  - Jesus cried out, “It is finished,” and then he died.
  - Cataclysmic events followed; the sky darkened and the earth quaked.
  - Pilate secured a company of guards to protect the tomb after he sealed it shut. Since there had been talk that Jesus would rise from the dead, Pilate was making sure no one would try to take the body, thus falsely trying to prove their claim.
  - Jesus’ disciples were absolutely terrified and went into hiding. They lost hope that Jesus was who they thought he was. Jesus’ work seemed to have gone up in smoke.
- ▶ It appeared as though the Jewish authorities accomplished what they set out to do. They silenced Jesus and effectively shut down his movement.
- ▶ How in the world did the disciples move from a terrified band of cowards to disciples who were willing to be martyred for their faith in Christ in such a small amount of time?
- ▶ Something happened.
- ▶ Five possible hypotheses concerning the resurrection have been presented over the centuries. Only one is accepted by faithful Christians.
  1. Jesus did not really die on the cross.
  2. The resurrection was a conspiracy.
  3. The disciples were hallucinating.
  4. The story is a legend and not factual.
  5. It really happened.

Catechist invites participants to share the following question with one other person. Share insights with the wider group.

- ▶ Have you ever doubted that Jesus rose from the dead?
- ▶ Have you ever doubted that Jesus is who we believe he is?
- ▶ How do you handle your doubts?
- ▶ How do you feel about them?

### Jesus did not really die on the cross

- ▶ Some have suggested that Jesus was not really dead, that he was revived after taken down from the cross. Medical evidence suggests otherwise. Medical professionals have argued that the spear that was thrust into Jesus’ side would have penetrated the right lung as well as the heart, which would have ensured his death.
- ▶ One way to check the authenticity of any biblical claim is to refer to secular sources. Josephus was a Jewish historian. Fragments of his writings exist that confirm the life of Jesus as well as his death.



- ▶ Both the philosopher Lucian and Tacitus confirmed the death of Jesus.
- ▶ Even scholars who deny the resurrection confirm that he lived and he died.

### **The resurrection was a conspiracy**

- ▶ Some people have suggested that Jesus' death was a conspiracy, and Jesus' body was stolen. It is pure nonsense.

### **Stolen body theory**

- ▶ Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council. He offered the use of his tomb, which would have been in a prominent place in the cemetery.
- ▶ Some suggest that Jesus was not put in Joseph's tomb; rather he was placed in some less obscure tomb.
- ▶ Since Joseph of Arimathea's tomb was guarded and in a prominent place, that was not possible. There were too many non-believing witnesses such as the guards themselves for that to have happened. The Roman guards would have had to be in on the conspiracy.
- ▶ We know the Roman guard protected the tomb, and we know the tomb was empty. Jesus' enemies accused the disciples of stealing the body, which clearly tells us that the tomb was empty.
- ▶ The fact that his body was never found when his enemies had such a vested interest in making sure that the disciples' claims were false is profound evidence that there simply was no body to be found.
- ▶ Did someone rob the tomb and take his body? Not possible. The guards who guarded the tomb were agents of the government. The tomb was sealed shut and would have required large numbers of men to move it, certainly not a feat that could be accomplished by a few in a short amount of time. How could they have stolen the body without the cooperation of the guards?
- ▶ Even though there was no denying an empty tomb, it alone would never have convinced Jesus' disciples that he rose from the dead.
- ▶ Something happened. What was it?

### **A case for the resurrection**

- ▶ The empty tomb would never have been enough to bring them out of frightened hiding. What brought them out of hiding?
- ▶ The disciples saw the Lord. That is what happened.
- ▶ Encounter with the risen Lord is the only reality that could have accomplished such a radical shift from terror to bold proclamation in such a short time.
- ▶ The disciples recounted how the Lord had appeared to them.

### **Multiple eye witnesses**

- ▶ Another point that mitigates against the conspiracy theory is the claim that Jesus appeared to the women first.
- ▶ Had this been a conspiracy they never would have admitted that the first

eyewitness account was from a woman. Women had no rights and were not allowed to testify to anything. If this had been a conspiracy, men would have had to be the first eye witnesses on the scene, since men were the only people who could officially testify to anything.

- ▶ When trying to prove the veracity of something, you certainly would not choose someone who was not allowed to testify.
- ▶ How does a conspiracy continue when there were hundred of eye witness accounts?
- ▶ Scriptures tell us that hundreds of people saw Jesus.
- ▶ Paul mentions over 500 witnesses at one time. If all he was passing on to his followers was a questionable fable, legend, or lie, he would have lost all credibility with his communities.
- ▶ We are told in Acts of the Apostles that Peter told a gathered crowd that they had seen Jesus and he was alive.
- ▶ There are numerous eyewitness accounts that would be very hard to fictionalize on such a grand scale.
- ▶ It is very difficult to imagine that hundreds of people could be part of such an outlandish conspiracy and keep their part in it quiet over the months and the years.

### **Martyrdom**

- ▶ One way archaeologists in Israel determine if a site is an authentic ancient Christian site is by the date of the find. The earlier and closer the remains are to the Jesus event, and the knowledge that people were willing to risk martyrdom and death to venerate the site, is a sure indication that it is an authentic site.
- ▶ The disciples very quickly shifted from frightened cowards to courageous martyr-willing disciples. Would they have done so for a lie? Hardly.
- ▶ They acted as they did because of their absolute assurance and conviction that Jesus was alive.

### **The disciples were hallucinating**

- ▶ The hallucination theory is ridiculous. Maybe one person could hallucinate. But it is unheard of for multiple people to hallucinate at the same time about the same thing.

### **The story is a legend and not factual**

- ▶ Some people have suggested that the Jesus story simply turned into a legend as a result of someone thinking they saw Jesus alive.
- ▶ Legends do not emerge when there are eye-witnesses still alive that can deny the truthfulness of the legend.
- ▶ Legends evolve by word of mouth and do not come with contemporary historical verification of the facts, such as secular historical sources that wrote about the life and death of Jesus.
- ▶ Consider the development of Christianity. A small band of disciples went out into the world to proclaim what they saw and heard and it led to the development of

Christianity throughout the then-known world. By all indications, the movement should have died out as one small movement among many.

- ▶ Yet, they went from a frightened band of former followers to zealous evangelists who refused to be silenced and were willing to die for their cause in a matter of days. All but one of the apostles were martyred.
- ▶ Something dramatic happened early on. They encountered the risen Christ. He reminded them of all he had taught them. He strengthened them for the new mission that they only now understood.
- ▶ Many scholars suggest that it is the blood of martyrs that is responsible for the growth of Christianity. One historian suggested, “Caesar and Christ met in the arena and Christ won” (Will Durant).
- ▶ One need only look today at modern oppressive regimes and the fear they have when martyrs who are willing to die for their cause refuse to be silenced.
- ▶ The bottom line is that even though we must approach Jesus with an open heart and accept the truth of his resurrection, there are no absolute proofs for the resurrection. There is ample evidence, however, to suggest that events happened the way they are recorded. Anything else would have been impossible to contain for 2,000 years. Not one shred of evidence to deny the resurrection has been found in 2,000 years of Christian history.
- ▶ Jesus died and rose from the dead as he said he would.
- ▶ The ultimate question then becomes, “So what?”
- ▶ So everything! That is so what!
- ▶ The fact of Jesus’ resurrection tells us that everything he promised us is true.
  - He is God’s Son.
  - He has returned to his Father’s right hand where he judges the hearts of men and women.
  - He has opened the gates of heaven for believers and paid the ultimate price for our sins.
  - God is the merciful Father who loves his children and desires intimate communion with them.
  - Jesus did send his Spirit to be his ongoing presence in the world until he returns in glory at the end of the world.
  - He does live within us; his life and his light are what guide and lead us if we but yield to it.
  - Whenever two or more are gathered in his name, he *is* present among us.

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in dyads and then share insights in the wider group. Catechist shares a story from his or her life and then invites others to similarly answer the questions and share from their life experience. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What did you hear in today’s session on Jesus Christ that you had not considered before or that may have strengthened your faith in him?
- ▶ What element in the Jesus story is the most difficult to believe?
- ▶ How difficult is it to believe in virginal conception?
- ▶ What implications are there to the case that was just made for the truth of the resurrection?

- ▶ What does it mean to you and to your life that Jesus rose from the dead?
- ▶ Is your belief in Jesus more an intellectual understanding of who Jesus is, or is he your Lord and Master of the Universe and of your life?
- ▶ Recent headlines read that the Ark of the Covenant has absolutely certifiably been found. No questions. The Ark of the Covenant from the Old Testament has verifiably been found. Three days later the same headlines declared the whole thing a hoax. It did not even take a week to expose the truth. How difficult do you think it would have been to keep a conspiracy or a hoax about Christ's resurrection quiet?
- ▶ If then, there is more evidence of the resurrection than not, what does it say about our faith in the living Christ?



## Mystagogy & your decision for change

Catechist invites participants to unpack what was learned in this session using these questions:

- ▶ Who is Jesus Christ?
- ▶ What does it mean when we say that Jesus is the eternal Son of God?
- ▶ Why did God send his Son?
- ▶ How does Jesus continue his relationship with us now that he is in heaven?
- ▶ Why can we confidently place our trust in the resurrection of Christ?
- ▶ What does it mean to you when we say that we have faith in the living Christ?



## Community Connections

- ▶ Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenges us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world. Christ empowers us to go out and transform the world.

Catechist informs the group of any parish activity taking place and makes arrangements for group participation. For example: Jesus' mission to establish the kingdom of God on earth is alive and well in our parish. There are so many ways to reach out to God's people. Our parish is sponsoring a free trade sale this weekend intended to see the wares of third country communities so they can secure a fair price for their

labors. They need volunteers to help with the sale. Volunteers are also needed at our social concerns office; you can call for more information.

Catechist invites participants to respond in faith to one or more of the following challenges.

- ▶ In what way does this teaching on Jesus Christ challenge you at this time in your life?
- ▶ In what way does Christ prompt change in your life?
- ▶ What needs to change?
- ▶ In what way does today's session on Jesus Christ invite you to more fully enter into Christ's death and resurrection? What do you need to die to in your life right now?
- ▶ Where is new life or resurrection needed? What can you do to make that happen?
- ▶ What are you powerless over and where in your life is the power of Christ needed to intervene?
- ▶ What one thing are you willing to do this week in response to what we have shared today? Change a belief, a behavior, an action, an addiction?

## Journal

Question for reflection throughout the week: Use one of the questions above that were not asked in the session and reflect on it in your journal throughout the week.



## Closing Prayer

Option 1: If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with Intercessions, Doxology ("Glory be to the Father..."), a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA # 90-97.

Option 2: If this is *not* a catechumenal setting, end with one or both of the Opening Prayers for the Feast of Christ the King in the Roman Missal. Include Intercessions and the Lord's Prayer.



## Appendix

#1. Earlier, we asked the question, “What implications are there to the case that was just made for the truth of the resurrection?” The implications are profound. For the past two years, I have struggled with doubt. I profess faith in Christ, but there is always the lingering doubt, what if we are wrong? I resist such doubt with my entire being. I have given my life’s work to my faith in Christ. It is the engine that drives my existence, yet still doubt lingers.

When my father was alive, he went to Mass every day. He and a friend used to tease each other after mass saying, “The joke would sure be on us if this is all a bunch of nonsense, wouldn’t it.” Yet, my father never wavered in his faith. He and Jesus were on a first name basis. He called Jesus his co-pilot. He taught me what a loving relationship with Jesus is all about.

When my mother had a serious mental breakdown when I was a teenager, my father prayed her back to health. He never gave up on his innocent, childlike faith. He passed that faith on to me. I am so grateful.

Such faith always needs to be strengthened. My life has been a testimony to the power of Christ to walk with me and invite me deeply into the mystery of his dying and rising. Yet, still I doubt. Why is that?

It was so comforting to hear that Mother Theresa had similar doubts. If someone so saintly can entertain such thoughts, then there is hope for me if I simply keep my eyes on Christ, he will see me through.

The research for the truth of the resurrection had a profound effect on me. As a student of biblical scholarship, I am fascinated by what we have learned about our ancient sources. I found the case for the resurrection to be extremely compelling. My hope is that others who may have doubts can find comfort and assurance in the case that can be made. Cowardly, fear-ridden disciples, overnight became willing martyrs for the faith. Something changed for them. They saw the living Christ.

I have seen the living Christ, not in the flesh, but in the events of my life. The only antidote for doubt is remembering. I am called to remember those Christ-events in my life and savor them for those times when doubt overtakes me.

## Jesus Christ Handout

- ▶ Jesus said to Peter, “Who do the people say I am? Who do you say that I am?”
- ▶ Disciples, theologians and evangelists have been answering Jesus’ question to Peter for 2,000 years.
- ▶ What do we officially believe about Jesus Christ?
- ▶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that we confess faith in Jesus of Nazareth.
  - He was born a Jew.
  - He was born of a Jewish woman at Bethlehem at the time of King Herod and emperor Caesar Augustus.
  - Jesus was a carpenter by trade.
  - He was tortured and crucified in Jerusalem at the hands of Pontius Pilate during the reign of Emperor Tiberius.
  - He is the eternal Son of God made man. In other words, as God’s Son there never was a time when he did not exist.
  - John the evangelist tells us that he came from God (13:3) and that he descended from heaven (3:13; 6:33).
  - John further reiterates that Jesus is “the Word made flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14, 16).
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- ▶ In the Nicene Creed, what we pray about Jesus, teaches us what we believe about him. The following is what we profess about Jesus Christ in every Sunday liturgy.
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- ▶ Jesus’ mission would be to save people from their sins.
- ▶ By intentionally naming Jesus, the angel Gabriel was signifying that God’s own name is present in his Son who was sent to redeem the world of sin.
- ▶ Thus, we can call on the powerful name of Jesus Christ because he alone has the power to save us.
- ▶ There is power in Jesus’ name. Every liturgical prayer ends with, “We ask this through Christ our Lord.”
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- ▶ Many good observant Jews recognized Jesus to be the Messiah who it was prophesied would come from the House of David.

- ▶ Jesus' anointing as Messiah was revealed to us at his baptism when the voice of God from heaven called Jesus his beloved Son.
- ▶ After Jesus' resurrection, his divine Sonship became manifest to his disciples through his glorified humanity. It was not until Jesus broke bread with the disciples that they recognized him. There was something different about him. He appeared to them in his glorified state.
- ▶ Jesus' had two distinct roles; God's Son and his role as the Suffering Servant who would give his life for the many.

## Why Did Jesus Become a Human Being?

- ▶ *Jesus became a human being in order to reconcile us with God.*
  - We were lost in sin and needed to be healed.
  - We were living in darkness and had to be led into the light.
  - We were captives who needed a Savior.
  - We were prisoners to sin who needed God's help.
  - We were slaves to sin who needed a deliverer. <sup>2</sup>
  - With humanity in such a dismal state, God, out of pure love, could do no less than send his Son to save us from sin and from ourselves.
- ▶ *Jesus became a human being so we might know God's love for us.*
  - A theologian once said that if God had not sent his Son or a part of himself, it would be very easy for us to say to God, "Sure you love us. Right. You have no idea what we have suffered. You have not walked in our shoes. How can we believe you love us when life here can be so miserable? Unless you walk in our shoes we will never believe in your love for us."
  - God had to send his Son, or we never would have believed his love for humanity.
- ▶ *Jesus became a human being in order to be for us an icon of holiness.*
  - Jesus was an example of holiness for us.
  - He taught us how to become holy.
- ▶ *Jesus became a human being so that we might share in his divine nature.*
  - We became God's child through the Incarnation of God's Son.
  - We pray in the Preface for Christmas and Epiphany that through the Incarnation a divine exchange took place.
  - Christ sanctified all creation, especially humanity. In so doing human beings share Christ's divine nature.
  - As God's children, we share in the divinity of Christ.
- ▶ Jesus is fully human and fully divine.
- ▶ Jesus is the second person of the Blessed Trinity (three persons in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit).
- ▶ Jesus was born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>2</sup> (Cf. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Orat. Catech.* 15: PG 45, 48 B)

- ▶ Jesus established a kingdom of peace and harmony. He preached kingdom living. His mission was to teach us a new way of living and being in the world. He showed us the face of his Father. He taught us how to love. He taught us the self-sacrificing nature of love.
- ▶ Jesus suffered, died and rose from the dead in order to save humanity from sin and to open the gates of eternal life.

## The Heart of Our Faith

- ▶ Thus is the heart of our belief in Jesus Christ. We can articulate articles of belief, but unless and until we foster an intimate personal relationship with him, what we know about Jesus is simply information, biography, and history.
- ▶ We profess faith in the living Christ, a Christ who conquered death once and for all, who opened the gates of heaven so that we might all enjoy eternal life, and who is present to us and desires intimate communion with us through his Holy Spirit even though he is absent and sits at his Father's right hand in heaven.
- ▶ How do we move from an intellectual understanding of who Jesus is to professing him as Lord and Master of the Universe and of our lives?
- ▶ The first step is to consider the Jesus event from a historical perspective. The second step is to pray for the gift of faith and then yield to it. While we will never be able to fully prove everything we believe about Jesus, there is enough scholarly, researched, and proven information that can give our faith a sound footing and ultimately give credence to our belief in Christ.

## How Are We to Believe that Jesus Is Who We Say He Is and He Accomplished What He Set Out to Do?

- ▶ Crucial to our faith in Jesus is our belief in his resurrection from the dead.
- ▶ Without the resurrection, Jesus would simply be another great prophet among many great prophets.
- ▶ How can we be confident that Jesus rose from the dead beyond our assent in faith that he did?

## The case for Jesus' resurrection

- ▶ Consider for a moment Jesus' absolute certainty that he would rise from the dead. He told his disciples that he would rise again. If it turned out that he did not rise from the dead, he would simply be another imposter or con artist among many others. Certainly, a religion that has lasted over 2,000 years would not have had the staying power if indeed the resurrection were a lie or a hoax.
- ▶ Let us recall the events of Calvary.
  - Jesus was brutally beaten, huge iron stakes were driven into his wrists, and he hung on the cross for hours. He died at 3:00 in the afternoon.
  - Jesus died at the same time the paschal lambs were being slaughtered for the sacrificial offering of atonement for sin.
  - Jesus cried out, "It is finished," and then he died.
  - Cataclysmic events followed; the sky darkened sky and the earth quaked.

- Pilate secured a company of guards to protect the tomb after he sealed it shut. Since there had been talk that Jesus would rise from the dead, Pilate was making sure no one would try to take the body, thus falsely trying to prove their claim.
- Jesus' disciples were absolutely terrified and went into hiding. They lost hope that Jesus was who they thought he was. Jesus' work seemed to have gone up in smoke.
- ▶ It appeared as though the Jewish authorities accomplished what they set out to do. They silenced Jesus and effectively shut down his movement.
- ▶ How in the world did the disciples move from a terrified band of cowards to disciples who were willing to be martyred for their faith in Christ in such a small amount of time?
- ▶ Something happened.
- ▶ Five possible hypotheses concerning the resurrection have been presented over the centuries. Only one is accepted by faithful Christians.
  1. Jesus did not really die on the cross.
  2. The resurrection was a conspiracy.
  3. The disciples were hallucinating.
  4. The story is a legend and not factual.
  5. It really happened.

### **Jesus did not really die on the cross**

- ▶ Some have suggested that Jesus was not really dead, that he was revived after taken down from the cross. Medical evidence suggests otherwise. Medical professionals have argued that the spear that was thrust into Jesus' side would have penetrated the right lung as well as the heart, which would have ensured his death.
- ▶ One way to check the authenticity of any biblical claim is to refer to secular sources. Josephus was a Jewish historian. Fragments of his writings exist that confirm the life of Jesus as well as his death.
- ▶ Both the philosopher Lucian and Tacitus confirmed the death of Jesus.
- ▶ Even scholars who deny the resurrection confirm that he lived and he died.

### **The resurrection was a conspiracy**

- ▶ Some people have suggested that Jesus' death was a conspiracy, and Jesus' body was stolen. It is pure nonsense.

### **Stolen body theory**

- ▶ Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council. He offered the use of his tomb, which would have been in a prominent place in the cemetery.
- ▶ Some suggest that Jesus was not put in Joseph's tomb; rather he was placed in some less obscure tomb.
- ▶ Since Joseph of Arimathea's tomb was guarded and in a prominent place, that was not possible. There were too many non-believing witnesses such as the guards



themselves for that to have happened. The Roman guards would have had to be in on the conspiracy.

- ▶ We know the Roman guard protected the tomb, and we know the tomb was empty. Jesus' enemies accused the disciples of stealing the body, which clearly tells us that the tomb was empty.
- ▶ The fact that his body was never found when his enemies had such a vested interest in making sure that the disciples' claims were false is profound evidence that there simply was no body to be found.
- ▶ Did someone rob the tomb and take his body? Not possible. The guards who guarded the tomb were agents of the government. The tomb was sealed shut and would have required large numbers of men to move it, certainly not a feat that could be accomplished by a few in a short amount of time. How could they have stolen the body without the cooperation of the guards?
- ▶ Even though there was no denying an empty tomb, it alone would never have convinced Jesus' disciples that he rose from the dead.
- ▶ Something happened. What was it?

#### **A case for the resurrection**

- ▶ The empty tomb would never have been enough to bring them out of frightened hiding. What brought them out of hiding?
- ▶ The disciples saw the Lord. That is what happened.
- ▶ Encounter with the risen Lord is the only reality that could have accomplished such a radical shift from terror to bold proclamation in such a short time.
- ▶ The disciples recounted how the Lord had appeared to them.

#### **Multiple eye witnesses**

- ▶ Another point that mitigates against the conspiracy theory is the claim that Jesus appeared to the women first.
- ▶ Had this been a conspiracy they never would have admitted that the first eyewitness account was from a woman. Women had no rights and were not allowed to testify to anything. If this had been a conspiracy, men would have had to be the first eye witnesses on the scene, since men were the only people who could officially testify to anything.
- ▶ When trying to prove the veracity of something, you certainly would not choose someone who was not allowed to testify.
- ▶ How does a conspiracy continue when there were hundreds of eye witness accounts?
- ▶ Scriptures tell us that hundreds of people saw Jesus.
- ▶ Paul mentions over 500 witnesses at one time. If all he was passing on to his followers was a questionable fable, legend, or lie, he would have lost all credibility with his communities.
- ▶ We are told in Acts of the Apostles that Peter told a gathered crowd that they had seen Jesus and he was alive.
- ▶ There are numerous eyewitness accounts that would be very hard to fictionalize

on such a grand scale.

- ▶ It is very difficult to imagine that hundreds of people could be part of such an outlandish conspiracy and keep their part in it quiet over the months and the years.

### **Martyrdom**

- ▶ One way archaeologists in Israel determine if a site is an authentic ancient Christian site is by the date of the find. The earlier and closer the remains are to the Jesus event, and the knowledge that people were willing to risk martyrdom and death to venerate the site, is a sure indication that it is an authentic site.
- ▶ The disciples very quickly shifted from frightened cowards to courageous martyr-willing disciples. Would they have done so for a lie? Hardly.
- ▶ They acted as they did because of their absolute assurance and conviction that Jesus was alive.

### **The disciples were hallucinating**

- ▶ The hallucination theory is ridiculous. Maybe one person could hallucinate. But it is unheard of for multiple people to hallucinate at the same time about the same thing.

### **The story is a legend and not factual**

- ▶ Some people have suggested that the Jesus story simply turned into a legend as a result of someone thinking they saw Jesus alive.
- ▶ Legends do not emerge when there are eye-witnesses still alive that can deny the truthfulness of the legend.
- ▶ Legends evolve by word of mouth and do not come with contemporary historical verification of the facts, such as secular historical sources that wrote about the life and death of Jesus.
- ▶ Consider the development of Christianity. A small band of disciples went out into the world to proclaim what they saw and heard and it led to the development of Christianity throughout the then-known world. By all indications, the movement should have died out as one small movement among many.
- ▶ Yet, they went from a frightened band of former followers to zealous evangelists who refused to be silenced and were willing to die for their cause in a matter of days. All but one of the apostles were martyred.
- ▶ Something dramatic happened early on. They encountered the risen Christ. He reminded them of all he had taught them. He strengthened them for the new mission that they only now understood.
- ▶ Many scholars suggest that it is the blood of martyrs that is responsible for the growth of Christianity. One historian suggested, “Caesar and Christ met in the arena and Christ won” (Will Durant).
- ▶ One need only look today at modern oppressive regimes and the fear they have when martyrs who are willing to die for their cause refuse to be silenced.
- ▶ The bottom line is that even though we must approach Jesus with an open heart and accept the truth of his resurrection, there are no absolute proofs for the

resurrection. There is ample evidence, however, to suggest that events happened the way they are recorded. Anything else would have been impossible to contain for 2,000 years. Not one shred of evidence to deny the resurrection has been found in 2,000 years of Christian history.

- ▶ Jesus died and rose from the dead as he said he would.
- ▶ The ultimate question then becomes, “So what?”
- ▶ So everything! That is so what!
- ▶ The fact of Jesus’ resurrection tells us that everything he promised us is true.
  - He is God’s Son.
  - He has returned to his Father’s right hand where he judges the hearts of men and women.
  - He has opened the gates of heaven for believers and paid the ultimate price for our sins.
  - God is the merciful Father who loves his children and desires intimate communion with them.
  - Jesus did send his Spirit to be his ongoing presence in the world until he returns in glory at the end of the world.
  - He does live within us; his life and his light are what guide and lead us if we but yield to it.
  - Whenever two or more are gathered in his name, he *is* present among us.